



**Governor Rod R. Blagojevich**  
**State of the State Address**  
**January 15, 2004**

Speaker Madigan. Senate President Jones. House Minority Leader Cross. Senate Minority Leader Watson.

Lieutenant Governor Quinn. Attorney General Madigan. Secretary of State White. Treasurer Topinka. Comptroller Hynes. Auditor General Holland. Superintendent Schiller.

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to address the General Assembly.

It s great to be back.

A year ago, we came together at a time when everything that should have been up was down.

We faced the aftermath of the worst corruption scandal in our state s long history.

At the same time, we faced the worst fiscal crisis in our state s long history- a record \$5 billion budget deficit, a budget deficit that was 13 times worse than anything we had ever seen.

We faced a failing economy, rising prescription drug prices, increasing concerns about homeland security, and a sense that state government just didn t care about the people.

And the people doubted our ability to govern, our ability to lead, our ability to solve problems.

They lost confidence in our integrity, they questioned our ability to act ethically, and they lost faith that we would put their interests before our own.

A year ago, there were far more questions than answers.

There was far more fear, than hope.

There was far more cynicism, than faith in the future.

When we came together last year, we were confronted with a number of challenges, but our task was clear: to reconnect people to their government, to show the people we could tackle difficult problems and make difficult decisions and do so without resorting to the tired, old solutions that put the special interests above the public interest, to show them we could act ethically, to show them we deserved their trust.

Today, thanks to the hard work, to the dedication, and to the commitment to change, of so many people in this room, I am proud to say that we are rising to the challenge.

Today, there is a growing feeling that government is once again on the people's side.

They saw that we were willing to embrace reform to do things differently, to do things better.

They saw that we weren't asking them to bail out a system in desperate need of reform.

That's what inspired their confidence. And that is what we must continue to do.

By embracing reform by showing the people we were prepared to change the way we earned their trust, change the way we treat their money, change the way we create jobs, change the way we deliver health care, change the way we give people from all walks of life the opportunity to work hard, to get ahead, and to build better lives, we've taken bold steps towards finally giving the people of Illinois a government that's of them, by them, and for them.

Thanks to Speaker Madigan, Senate President Jones, Representative Cross, Senator Watson and many others, we enacted real, meaningful ethics reform, reforms that ended the practice of the unlimited wining and dining of public officials; reforms that ended the practice of using the people's money to fund public service announcements, reforms that ended the conflict of interest that exists when government officials regulate companies one day and go to work for them the next; reforms that now require each Constitutional Officer and the Legislative branch to hire independent Inspector Generals to monitor wrongdoing; and reforms that create an independent ethics commission the first of its kind in our state's long history.

And as we began giving the people of Illinois a reason to place their trust in our ability to act ethically, we also started giving them a reason to believe we could be responsible with their money.

Last year, almost every state in the nation faced a significant fiscal challenge.

And if you look at how almost every one of those states dealt with that challenge, almost all of them either raised income or sales taxes, cut spending for education, health care, and public safety, or did a combination of both.

Not us.

Not here in Illinois.

Instead of slashing spending in areas that help people areas like health care, public safety and education, and instead of resorting to the tired, old solution of simply asking the people for more of their hard-earned money by having the will to make tough choices, by cutting over \$1.5 billion in waste and inefficiency, by merging state agencies, cutting payroll, and streamlining government, we took on a historic, record \$5 billion budget deficit and didn't raise the income tax, didn't raise the sales tax, and still invested nearly \$1 billion in new money for education, health care and public safety.

And just as we embraced change when it came to ethics reform, when it came to the budget, we began to fundamentally change the way we deliver health care in Illinois.

In the past, people used to look to Washington for ideas and for money.

Everyone assumed that because of the size of our deficit, and the inability of state government to confront and solve difficult problems, the only way to give people better and less expensive health care was by getting the federal government to solve our problems for us.

But we didn't do that.

Instead, we took matters into our own hands.

We started with an issue that threatens the health and the well-being of our seniors, of the disabled, and of consumers in every part of Illinois, and all across our nation.

We finally took on the issue of the high cost of prescription drugs.

Last spring, we created the first prescription drugs buying club in the nation.

By pooling the purchasing power of the State of Illinois, and of up to 1.5 million senior citizens, we've started negotiating discounts with drug manufacturers that will help our senior citizens save up to 20% on the cost of their medicine.

20% for an average senior citizen can mean hundreds of dollars of savings each year.

But we didn't stop there.

We can take pride in the fact that last year, Illinois was only one of three states in the entire nation to actually increase health care coverage for those who can't afford it.

At a time when 47 states either kept their coverage levels steady or reduced health care coverage altogether, Illinois expanded the KidCare program and the FamilyCare program, so that 65,000 children and 300,000 working men and women will now have access to health care.

That's 65,000 children and 300,000 working parents who didn't have health care, and now will even though we faced a \$5 billion budget deficit.

Illinois was the first state in the nation to ban Ephedra, a performance enhancing drug that has claimed the lives of over 100 people.

And we did it more than six months before the federal government finally acted.

And while we're on the subject of performance enhancing drugs, how is it that in the 21st century, insurance companies can cover Viagra for men, but not birth control for women?

It just isn't fair.

So last spring, Illinois became the 21st state in the nation to require health insurers to cover female contraceptives.

I'm happy we did that.

But the battle to bring down the cost of health care continues.

That's why we are going to keep fighting the big drug companies, we are going to keep fighting the federal government, and we are going to keep fighting the FDA until they give consumers in Illinois and consumers across the nation access to the marketplace, and an opportunity to safely and legally

import prescription drugs from Canada.

We are going to keep fighting until they give us the opportunity to help our senior citizens and our consumers save as much as 50% on the cost of their prescription drugs, and the opportunity to protect our seniors, and our consumers, and our taxpayers, from being ripped off by the big drug companies, who use their clout and their influence to keep prices high.

The changes we made didn't stop with ethics, didn't stop with the budget, and didn't stop with health care either.

Last year, we finally changed the way we view work, the way we create jobs, and the way we utilize our own strengths and our own resources.

Instead of treating the taxpayers and their money as if they exist simply to fill the state coffers, we began to see them as more than just sources of revenue, we began to see them as people who have to get up every morning and go to work, make a living, and support their families.

And that's why we did something in the beginning of the 21st century that should have been done in the beginning of the last century: we finally passed a law that says if you're a woman and you're doing the same work as a man, you ought to be paid the same as a man—otherwise you are breaking the law.

To make the lives of working people a little easier, we passed a law that raised the minimum wage from \$5.15 an hour to \$6.50 an hour.

The men and women who work at jobs that pay the minimum wage do the work most people don't want to do.

They work hard. They deserve our respect. And they deserved this raise.

At the same time, we developed a vision of economic development that begins with leveraging the talents of our own people, of our own regions, and the resources of our own land.

That task began with legislation authorizing the expansion of O'Hare airport—a project that will create nearly 200,000 new jobs over the next ten years.

It continued with legislation that can bring back the coal industry in Illinois—by taking advantage of new technology—and by making hundreds of millions of dollars in low interest loans available to companies who want to build clean coal power plants, right here in Illinois.

This could mean 6,000 jobs to the communities of Central and Southern Illinois that have witnessed so much hardship and so little progress over the last generation.

We didn't stop with coal either.

We extended the ethanol tax credit for ten more years, and we created a host of new incentives to encourage the production and use of biodiesel fuels.

And when it comes to taking advantage of our state's resources, we finally—finally—began to right the ship, when it comes to honoring our state's greatest human resource, not to mention this nation's greatest President—Abraham Lincoln.

Recently, former Governor Jim Edgar agreed to serve as the Chair of the Abraham Lincoln Library Foundation.

And in October, I named Richard Norton Smith, the nation's preeminent presidential historian as Director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum.

With Governor Edgar and Richard Norton Smith at the helm, we can turn what has been an embarrassment and a failure into one of this state's greatest assets and attractions.

If we do this right, the Lincoln Library could be to the City of Springfield, what the Statue of Liberty is to New York, what the Golden Gate Bridge is to San Francisco, and what Graceland is to Memphis.

On the economy, we changed the way we approach spurring development and creating jobs.

The old method of economic development was all about waiting for a company to say they were leaving, and then throwing lots of tax incentives at them.

Not anymore.

We've developed a program called Opportunity Returns, a proactive, hands-on, regionally focused plan with one goal and one goal only creating jobs.

We've been working with local communities, and, with their ideas and yours, we've been developing and launching detailed plans that address the specific needs of each region of our state.

From providing low interest loans so manufacturers can buy new equipment, to providing job training so workers can upgrade their skills, to offering grants to budding entrepreneurs, to building the infrastructure needed to efficiently move goods and services, to promoting the natural resources and tourist attractions each region has to offer, we will make each region of our state more marketable, more technologically savvy, more accessible, better trained, and better equipped than ever before.

We are tired of waiting for Washington to act.

We are tired of waiting for the economic recovery to start producing real jobs.

We cannot afford to wait any longer.

We need to take action now, and that's exactly what we're doing.

And just as Illinois has launched one of the most aggressive, ambitious job creation programs in the nation, we're also taking the lead when it comes to public safety.

Illinois is now considered one of the most prepared states in the nation when it comes to counter-terrorism.

In fact, the Centers for Disease Control this year gave Illinois its highest rating when it comes to our ability to respond to a bioterrorist attack.

And we're building on this success by moving forward on our new Statewide Terrorism Intelligence Center, our new State Emergency Operating Center, and we are well on our way to providing new personal protection equipment to every first responder in our state.

At the same time that we're protecting our homeland security, we're also working to keep people safe in our towns, in our neighborhoods, and on our roads.

This year, we enacted three of the toughest driver safety laws in the nation, laws we believe can save over 140 lives every single year.

We also launched what may be the most comprehensive, technologically sophisticated AMBER Alert System in the nation.

In 2003, thanks to our new AMBER alert system the State Police recovered six abducted children using tips from people who saw or heard the AMBER Alert.

We keep crossing our fingers and praying that no child is ever abducted, but God-forbid, should it happen again, we pray our success in finding them continues.

We're not only leading the way in fighting crime. We're also leading the way when it comes to reforming the criminal justice system.

We enacted legislation that made Illinois the first state in the nation the first state in the nation to legislatively require that all homicide interrogations be videotaped.

We required law enforcement to collect data on racial profiling so we can once and for all put a stop to it.

And thanks to the leadership of Emil Jones and many others, we passed over a dozen major death penalty reforms reforms that hopefully will begin to mend a broken system and heal a loss of faith in its fairness.

Ethics reform. Budget reform. Creating jobs. Making health care less expensive. Keeping people safe.

Last year, we made major reforms and took major steps in every one of those areas.

And in the area of education, we also made some noteworthy reforms.

In the area of higher education, we became the first state in the nation to require that at public universities, the tuition you pay as a freshman is not a penny more than the tuition you'll pay as a senior.

We enacted legislation that allows undocumented immigrants who attend Illinois high schools for three years to pay in-state tuition rates at our public universities.

And while our system of educating children in kindergarten through high school needs a great deal of reform, we did take several important steps, including providing funding in last year's budget to send 8,300 at-risk children to pre-school providing \$500 million in funding for new school construction, and creating the Illinois Future Teachers Corps, a program that provides \$5,000 scholarships for new teachers.

Those were good ideas, and necessary reforms, but make no mistake about it, we need to do a lot more.

I'm not satisfied with the state of education in the State of Illinois.

The children deserve better.

The parents deserve better.

The taxpayers deserve better.

Spending more money for education, and creating more mandates for our schools, without making the real, fundamental, systemic changes, in the way we manage our schools, in the way we spend our education dollars, and in the way we hold people accountable for results, nothing we do no matter how much money we spend will help our children learn better.

If we are really serious about fixing our schools, then we have to be serious about change and reform.

Because while Illinois is blessed with thousands of good schools, with thousands of good, hardworking, dedicated principals and administrators, with tens of thousands of smart, committed, dedicated teachers, and with millions of involved, caring parents, and most importantly, millions of kids who are eager to learn, our education system is still failing too many children.

Look at the facts:

38% of kids in the third grade can't read at the third grade level.

If you can't read, you can't learn.

36% of eighth graders do not meet eighth grade reading standards.

41% of eighth graders cannot write on an eighth grade level.

Not only that, 44% of eleventh grade students can't meet basic reading standards.

One in seven students in Illinois never graduates from high school.

And 48% of eleventh grade students taking the ACT exam are not ready for college without having to repeat classes.

We can't continue to let that happen.

Illinois has many great schools, Illinois has many great teachers, many great administrators, and many great principals, but if we are honest with ourselves, we can't help but admit that when it comes to educating our children, we can do better.

And while there is no one single cause for the situation we find ourselves in, and there is no one single villain, the problem clearly begins at the top, with the Illinois State Board of Education.

In 1970, the Illinois Constitutional Convention created the State Board of Education.

The idea was to create an independent body that could regulate and support our schools without getting caught up in politics.

The idea was noble, but it isn't working.

Instead of being an independent body that could regulate and support our schools, the Illinois State Board of Education is like an old, Soviet style bureaucracy it's clunky and inefficient, it issues mandates, it spends money, it dictates policy, and it isn't accountable to anyone for anything.

Yes, they've operated independently, but independent of whom?

I'll tell you;

Independent of parents.

Independent of students.

Independent of teachers.

Independent of principals.

Independent of accountability.

Independent of success.

Independent of results.

Like many unaccountable bureaucracies, the Illinois State Board of Education turned into an organization that exists more for the benefit of its own administrators, than for the benefit of the children of this state.

No matter how good our local schools are, no matter how dedicated their principals and their teachers might be, no matter how involved their parents, the lack of leadership and the lack of accountability at the top—the State Board of Education's penchant for constant interference, its ever-changing rules, its ever-growing number of regulations, the crushing amounts of paperwork, handcuffs our educators, and far worse than that, shortchanges our children.

The State Board of Education will tell you the answer to our problems is more money.

But if you look at how our education dollars in Illinois are spent, and if you look at the rules and restrictions the State Board uses to tell our local schools how the money has to be spent, it becomes clear that money alone cannot solve our problems.

In Illinois, only 46 cents of every dollar spent on a child's education goes to classroom instruction.

Only 46 cents.

That means 54 cents of every dollar that's spent on a child's education goes to something other than classroom instruction.

That means only 46 percent of education funding actually goes to educating children.

The rest, more than half, and I keep repeating this figure because it's so astounding, never makes its way into the classroom.

Now, there will be those who will admit that kids aren't learning as well as they should, that not enough kids are learning how to read, that too many children are dropping out of school, and that we can better prepare our children for college.

But they will say that the only reason we find ourselves with these problems is that we're not spending enough money.

Let me be the first one to say—we need to invest more money in our classrooms.



But the money has to go to the classroom.

Look at the facts: while we can do better, Illinois still ranks 16th in the nation in the amount of money taxpayers invest in total per pupil spending.

But when it comes to how we spend that money, Illinois ranks only 40th in the nation then it comes to seeing that money invested in the classroom to teach our children.

40th in the nation.

Thirty nine other states do a better job than we do when it comes to how much money makes its way into the classroom.

By comparison, California for all of its problems does a better job than we do.

The Golden State spends 53% of their education dollars on classroom instruction.

Pennsylvania 54%

New York 60% on classroom instruction.

We spend nearly \$20 billion on education in Illinois each year.

\$20 billion dollars.

And of the \$20 billion we spend in Illinois \$10.5 billion never finds its way into the classroom.

\$3.4 billion goes for services like school social workers, lunches, and buses.

But \$7.1 billion goes for administration and operations.

If we just reached the national average of how much education money finds its way into the classroom for instruction, schools in Illinois would have another \$1.4 billion that could be invested directly into teaching children how to read and how to learn.

That would be great if we did but we don't so the question is Where is all of that money going?

Well, we know a few things: we know that not nearly enough of it is going to educate our children, we know that the incredible burden of rules and regulations imposed on local schools by the State Board of Education makes it practically impossible for local schools to invest more money into the classroom, and we know that now we're caught in a vicious cycle, where the more rules and regulations they impose, the more the State Board of Education can justify its own existence.

That's the cart leading the horse, the tail wagging the dog, and patient treating the doctor, all rolled up in one.

So what does the State Board of Education do?

We know the State Board of Education spends more than \$50 million a year just to exist.

We know their 40 highest paid administrators make an average of \$90,000 per year which is almost twice as much money as the average teacher earns.

As schools struggle to make ends meet, as kids struggle to read, as we confront the issue of teacher shortages, the State Board of Education spends the people's money on things like high priced contracts with consulting firms, lobbying firms, and public relations firms.

In fact, rather than sever their ties with these high priced firms, the State Board recently indicated they would rather cut programs that certify private schools, programs that subsidize GED testing, and programs that certify teachers.

They chose lawyers, and consultants and public relations experts over teachers, students and schools.

What kind of priorities are those?

And as the State Board busies itself wasting the people's money, the problems only continue to mount.

Because the State Board of Education can't figure out how to properly inspect school food, 42 children in Will County became sick after eating chicken contaminated with ammonia.

Even worse, the State Board's own investigation showed that they were aware of a connection between returned food from other schools and an ammonia leak at a State Board contracted facility, but the bureaucracy failed to do anything about it.

In fact, two State Board officials were indicted in connection with this incident.

Because they ignored the risk, those children got sick.

Because the State Board couldn't figure out how to issue school report cards, 368 schools were incorrectly identified as having failed to meet new federal standards.

In fact, a recent analysis showed that the State Board's 2003 Report Cards contained 34,261 errors, affecting 75% of Illinois schools.

Under current federal law, when schools receive a failing grade, those failing schools have to change the kinds of courses they have to offer.

It means children can easily transfer out of the school, and it means a whole new series of problems, which means more paperwork and more expenses.

That may be appropriate if a school actually deserves a failing grade.

But when nearly 35,000 errors are made in school report cards, and 368 schools are incorrectly labeled as failing, that creates a serious problem, especially when the State Board is paying consultants millions of dollars to ensure the report card process goes smoothly.

Because the State Board of Education keeps changing the standards schools use to evaluate their students' progress, teachers don't know what to teach, schools don't know what to offer, and students don't know how to prepare.

To sum it up, the Illinois State Board of Education has failed in its mission.

It's a burden to the taxpayers.

It's a drain on local schools.

It s an albatross to our principals and teachers.

It s not helping our children.

And it hasn t lived up to what the delegates at our Constitutional Convention envisioned, something far different something far better than what we ended up with.

That s why, today, I am calling for change.

I am calling on the legislature to act, to end a system that s not efficient, that s not accountable, and that has failed our children year after year.

I am urging the legislature to replace that system with a Department of Education that s accountable accountable to the Governor, accountable to the Legislature, and most importantly, accountable to the people of this state.

It would be easy to keep the current system in place where no one blames us.

It would be easy to run from this challenge.

Easy for the Governor to run from this challenge.

Easy for the legislature to run from this challenge.

Easy, but wrong.

It is time we stop running away from the problem.

It s time we started taking responsibility for our schools.

Mayor Daley took responsibility for Chicago s public schools in 1995.

It worked.

It s time we take responsibility for every school in Illinois.

If we don t make our education system accountable, it will never improve.

Without accountability, there s no one to look to for results, there s no one to look to to make meaningful reforms and changes, there s no one to explain to the taxpayers why their money isn t being spent more wisely, there s no one to answer to parents why their children aren t doing better.

No system can work if it isn t accountable to the bottom line.

And that s the heart of the problem:

The State Board of Education answers to no one. They re responsible to no one.

And so it s not surprising that their only solution to the problems in our schools, is to not first ask; what can we do better?

Is to not ask; how can we do more with what we have?

Is to not ask; how can we change?

No.

They don't do that.

Their only solution to the problems in our schools—their only solution—is to ask for more of your money.

They would rather see you, the taxpayer, pay more money in taxes, have less money for your children, less money to improve your home, less money to save for college, they would rather do that—than do things differently, operate more efficiently, work harder and get better results.

Right now, we have a system that on the one hand—is completely unaccountable, and on the other hand, is more than willing to ask the taxpayers to bail them out.

The State Board of Education won't take responsibility for results, but they'll gladly ask the people for more and more of their hard-earned money.

I can't think of any other place—not in business, not in sports, not in the media—not even in government, not anywhere that would allow this kind of system to survive.

Even the Berlin Wall eventually came down.

Allowing the State Board of Education to continue down this path is like throwing money down the drain.

Whether it's your position to support raising the income tax, or whether you support swapping income taxes and property taxes, or whether you support holding the line on taxes and reprioritizing spending so more money goes into our schools, all of the arguments to support those positions fall short when only 46 cents on every dollar—that is spent on education—finds its way into the classroom.

Last year, despite a \$5 billion budget deficit, we found \$400 million in new money for education.

That increase was bigger than the last two years, combined.

We increased the foundation level for general school aid last year by \$250 dollars per student.

Under our plan, we believe we can save more than \$1 billion over the next four years, every penny of which could and would be invested right into the classroom.

Perhaps even more importantly, the first thing our Department of Education would do is sit down with local schools, local principals and local administrators, and listen, and identify every mind-numbing, bureaucratic rule that takes away money, resources, time and attention from the classroom, and wipe it off the books.

Our local school districts could do a lot better if they were set free from the bureaucratic dictates of the Illinois State Board of Education, and instead were allowed to make more decisions at the local level and rely more on their own common sense. What would common sense and accountability look like in our schools?

Let's start with seven real reforms:

Currently, the State Board collects and reviews 93 different kinds of reports and forms annually, quarterly, and sometimes monthly, from 892 different school districts.

And those reports just deal with how money is spent.

Our first reform reduce those burdens.

That alone, would allow our schools to spend less money on administration, and invest it directly into the classroom.

Second, we can help schools by providing them with better administrative services, for far less than they spend now.

By creating regional service centers to pool basic functions that exceed the capacity of many local districts functions like accounting, auditing, and accounts payable, we can save \$12 to \$20 million each year, every penny of which would go right back to local schools, provided it goes back into the classroom.

At the same time, we could also provide financial advice to struggling school districts free of charge to help them reduce their costs, shed unnecessary bureaucracy and waste, and get back on their feet.

Third, we can help schools save between \$80 and \$180 million dollars each year by consolidating the purchase and administration of employee benefits without removing local control over coverage levels.

By creating an employee benefits purchasing center, we could leverage our purchasing power, negotiate better deals on health insurance and other benefits for teachers, save money, and allow local schools to focus on their mission teaching children.

Fourth, we can help schools by better managing school construction.

The state s five year school construction program ends this year.

With class sizes too large, with schools in disrepair, with schools lacking basic facilities, we can t stop now.

But we can also do better with our money.

Through better and more efficient project management, by building facilities that schools can share, by creating a local matching grant program to help schools pay for maintenance and building upkeep, and by cutting the 6% fee normally charged for project management down to 1%, we can save up to \$160 million over four years.

In the event we ultimately choose to invest \$550 million each year on school construction, with these reforms we can take that same amount of money that the State Board spends right now and end up building 14 more schools and 350 more classrooms than the State Board of Education could.

350 more classrooms and 14 more schools, not by spending more money, but just by being more efficient.

That s 350 classrooms and 14 schools that otherwise wouldn t be built if we allow the State Board of Education to continue to run our schools.

Fifth, we can help schools by consolidating the purchasing power of our 4,000 schools and 892 districts.

We can leverage far better deals for everything from computer paper to pencils and save over five hundred million dollars over four years.

Today some schools pay \$9.78 for Elmer's glue, while others pay just \$5.66.

Some schools pay almost \$1.00 for a pair of scissors in a 12-pack while others pay just a quarter.

By making sure all schools are getting the best possible prices, we can save as much as half a billion dollars, with every penny invested right back into the classroom.

Sixth, we can help schools by streamlining applications for state funding, and by re-writing programs to cut out the bureaucracy, so they can spend less time worrying about how to pay for things and more time educating children.

The State Board of Education has created more than 2,800 pages of administrative rules to govern education in Illinois.

By the way, recently, we took a walk over to Borders Bookstore, and checked on the size of a few other important books.

Here's what we found:

The King James Bible has 1009 pages and it covers all of Christianity.

The Torah has 620 pages and it covers all of Judaism.

The Qur'an has 635 pages and it covers all of Islam.

So according to the State Board of Education, it takes 2,800 pages all these rules and regulations to run our schools, more than all of the rules of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, combined.

This is a bureaucratic nightmare of biblical proportions.

Instead of making schools go through all of these rules, and through all of these elaborate application and approval procedures, we can streamline grant applications, and provide funding to schools on the front end, instead of making them go through a lengthy and inefficient claims and reimbursement process on the back end.

I don't know about you, but I have a lot more faith in our local schools, in their ability, in their dedication, in their commitment to helping children, than I do in the State Board of Education.

Local schools know better what their children need, they know what their teachers need, and most importantly, they're the ones who have to answer to the parents.

Every time you talk to local administrators, superintendents, principals, and teachers, they all tell you the same thing: the State Board of Education is eating up money that should be going into the classroom, and making local educators waste time filling out paperwork rather than teaching children.

Often, the State Board spends money to perform certain functions like reviewing district claims forms, and then duplicate the work by requiring districts to hire CPAs to review and certify the forms anyway.

If you believe in your local schools, then you should show it by giving them more control, not by burying

them in more and more paperwork.

Seventh, we can help schools and save money by reducing the extensive, and expensive and unnecessary management structure at the State Board of Education.

The management of a Department of Education could be integrated with the rest of state government, so we wouldn't have to replicate every single function, which is what happens under the current system.

Functions like legal, personnel, government relations, and public relations, are all already being performed for 30 different state agencies.

We could easily perform the same services for one more agency, without having to spend the millions of dollars that currently goes to the State Board of Education, instead of to local schools.

Not only can we do it for far less money, which means more money going into the classroom, we can do it better.

The Illinois Departments of Agriculture and Public Health can make sure that every food service operation in every district in the state is properly inspected, and they can provide a level of expertise, professionalism, and know-how that can not only catch problems before they occur, but in cases like the chicken that made so many children in Will County sick, when our inspectors find a problem like that, unlike the State Board, they won't ignore it, they won't sweep it under the rug, they will deal with it.

These are seven common sense reforms to being accountability to education and to improve our schools.

Let's not run away from this responsibility.

Let's get it done.

Our plan does however envision a role for the State Board of Education.

When it comes to thinking about long-term ideas, researching best-practices, and looking at curricula around the nation that might be appropriate for Illinois, the State Board can provide a useful function.

But when it comes to the day to day management of our schools, to spending the taxpayers' money efficiently, to giving local schools the flexibility they need to operate, to answering to the parents and children of this state, the current model isn't working.

Now, I'm not saying that creating a Department of Education will solve all the problems in our schools.

It won't.

I'm not saying that a Department of Education or a Secretary of Education will know all of the answers to all of our problems.

They won't.

And I'm not claiming that by creating a Department of Education that over night will see dramatic improvement in test scores.

That will take time.

But, by creating a Department of Education that's accountable to the legislature, accountable to the governor, and most importantly, accountable to the parents and to the children of this state, this will solve more of our problems, answer more of our questions, and free up more money, more time, and more resources for the classroom, so that children can learn, test scores can improve, and the education system in Illinois gets better.

I know I'm not the only one who wants a system that's accountable, that's efficient, and that's effective.

Over the past few years, members of the legislature have proposed ideas similar to what I'm proposing today.

In fact, as recent as last spring, State Senator Bill Brady proposed legislation to create an accountable, efficient, results-oriented Department of Education.

And over the years, many other legislators have championed ideas to reform the State Board of Education, including Senate President Jones, Senator Vince DeMuzio, Senator John Jones, Representative Danny Reitz, Representative Mike Bost, Representative Bill Black, Representative Don Moffitt, Representative Monique Davis, Representative Jack Franks, Representative Mike Boland, and Representative Renee Kosel.

The idea of reforming the State Board of Education cuts across party lines.

It transcends ideology, geography, ethnicity, and race.

It resides with everyone who thinks our children deserve better.

I think it's time we get started.

Now, making our education system efficient and accountable will go a long way. But it's not enough.

The notion of developing not just strong minds but strong bodies and a strong sense of civic responsibility goes all the way back to the Golden Age of Athens in the 5th Century B.C.

It's an ideal that helped shape our nation's commitment to public education at the beginning of our Republic.

But if you look at our schools today, it's equally clear we are falling short of those ideals.

That's why I am proposing several new programs intended to produce the following results:

- (1) Kids who learn how to read at an early age;
- (2) Parents who are involved in their child's education;
- (3) Teachers who have the training and support they need;
- (4) Kids who are healthy and focused; and
- (5) Kids who understand what it means to be part of a community.

Ask any expert and they will tell you that the single most important factor when it comes to a child's education is learning to read.



If you can't read, chances are, you won't learn.

That's why we're taking several new steps to help kids learn how to read, and get them started as early as possible.

Last year's budget included funding to send 8,300 children from at-risk communities to pre-school.

When I introduce this year's budget in a little over one month, despite the financial pressures our state still faces, we will continue our commitment to sending kids to pre-school and getting them started in school as early as possible.

But, that isn't enough.

Studies show that reading aloud to children is the number one factor in helping them learn to read at an early age.

That's why my office and Senate President Jones' office have teamed up to develop a personal library program - our own book of the month club - so that every single child born in Illinois - from birth to age 5 will receive a book in the mail, every month, until they start kindergarten.

And when they turn 5 they'll receive a library card.

Every child will also receive a dictionary.

We're working with the Dollywood Foundation, which has had success in implementing this program in 32 different states, including Edgar and Whiteside Counties here in Illinois.

And so far, the program has worked.

Studies have shown that 85% of participants in the personal libraries program have said they read to their children almost every day.

That is a big step forward.

When this program is off the ground, Illinois will be the first in the nation to offer a personal library to every child five and under in the state.

Just as it seems clear that having more books in the home will help children learn to read, it seems equally clear that the more involved parents are in their child's education, the better their kids will do in school.

That's why we're bringing back Project Success, a program that was created by Governor Edgar.

Project Success brings together parents, community leaders, faith-based organizations, and providers of different services in each community to identify the needs of local students, and figure out how to meet them.

That could range from families who need health or dental care to students who need after school tutoring.

Project Success was a success here in Illinois.

At its peak, it served 350,000 families in 90 different counties.

We not only want to bring it back, we want to expand Project Success so that it serves every county in this state.

Students are one part of the equation. Parents are another. But without qualified, dedicated teachers, none of it adds up.

First, we need to make sure that those teaching our children to read have the proper training when it comes to reading.

That's why I'm proposing legislation that would require all elementary school teachers to complete 50% of their certificate renewal requirements through coursework and activities that focus on best practices when it comes to teaching children how to read.

Not only do we have to give teachers the tools they need, we have to free up their time, to do what they're supposed to do—teach.

Unfortunately, under the State Board's maze of teacher recertification rules, teachers are burdened with a process that includes:

a 61 page manual,

8 different types of forms,

and as many as 100 different pieces of paper they have to file—all in order to keep teaching our children.

And at the same time, the State Board has eliminated nearly all forms of technical assistance to help teachers through this arduous process.

Every minute teachers waste filling out forms is time they could be spending preparing themselves to educate their students.

And despite a process that requires teachers to fill out nearly 100 forms, the State Board has still failed to develop the programs that beginning teachers need to receive their certification, leaving 7,000 hardworking teachers in bureaucratic limbo.

We can't attract enough teachers as it is, and they're driving 7,000 teachers away.

That's why we need to create an independent teacher certification board, so that teachers can focus on completing their professional development, and not get caught up in the State Board of Education's endless thicket of red tape.

Second, we need to make sure that struggling schools have access to reading specialists.

Specialists who help students learn to read, and offer teachers some of the new ideas out there that are being used to teach children how to read.

Third, we need to find more ways to bring teachers into the classroom.

As of October 1, nearly 1,400 teaching positions in Illinois went unfilled.

This is a national problem, so we're competing with other states.

Last spring, we enacted legislation creating the Illinois Future Teachers Corps, which provides \$5,000

and \$10,000 scholarships to college students willing to teach in Illinois.

However, college students studying education aren't the only people who may have something to add to a classroom.

Not every type of life experience is relevant to teaching.

And certain types of teachers need traditional forms of training, just like a doctor goes to medical school.

But people in other professions often can and do have something to offer our students.

That's why I'm forming a task force that includes traditionally trained teachers, education experts, and people who have come to the teaching profession by way of another career to figure out how to develop a program for people who bring different experiences and backgrounds and can share them in the classroom.

Involved parents, well-trained teachers, and children who begin reading at an early age are all necessary to improve education here in Illinois.

But no matter how involved a parent is, no matter how well trained a teacher is, no matter at what age a child learns to read, if a child isn't healthy, if he or she can't concentrate in school, if he or she doesn't eat a good breakfast, or doesn't get enough exercise, it's not only difficult to do well in school, it's difficult to learn the habits you need to live a healthy life.

Now, I'm not saying, that teaching children about nutrition and exercise is as important as teaching them how to read or do math.

But when you look at the crisis facing our children today—a time when more than three times as many children are overweight than they were twenty years ago, a time when Type II Diabetes has increased by 700% among children—at a time when the Director of the Yale University Center for Eating and Weight Disorders says that this could be the first generation of American children to lead shorter lives than their parents, it's clear we have to do more than just teach them reading and math.

That's why I'm proposing several initiatives that will help children eat better, exercise more, become better students, and live healthier and longer lives.

First, it's time to stop sending children mixed messages by teaching them about nutrition in the classroom, and then peddling soda and junk food just a few feet away.

That's why House Minority Leader Tom Cross and I have proposed new legislation that would ban the sale of soda and junk food from school vending machines.

Instead of selling soda, they can sell juice, water and milk.

The companies can supply vending machines with healthy choices, just as easily as they can sell Coke, or Mountain Dew, or Dr. Pepper.

In fact, if Dr. Pepper were alive today, I'm sure he would think this is a good idea too.

Second, it's time we finally pass the Childhood Hunger Relief Act.

This act requires schools to provide breakfast to children who otherwise would not be able to afford it.

The cost of this program is estimated to be nearly \$1 million.

Yes, times are tough, but we will not balance the budget on the backs of hungry children.

Third, we've got to get our kids active again.

We live in a time with hundreds of television channels, dvd's, tivo, video games, computers, and every other possible device that keeps kids sitting in front of a screen, instead of running around in a playground.

That's not healthy.

The quality of a child's play says a lot about a society.

It's great that our children are so computer literate.

But their day cannot start and end in front of a screen.

Children need to be active. That means running, and jumping and skipping, and not just fast forwarding, downloading and instant messaging.

I know many schools have waivers from offering physical education.

I know many schools don't have the gyms and facilities they need to give kids a place to run and exercise.

But we can't let those excuses get in the way of getting kids active again.

It's why we have to end the practice of giving schools waivers from offering physical education, it's why our school construction program has to focus on providing the facilities schools need to give their students a place to play, and it's why we have to start stressing exercise and activity in our schools again.

A Department of Education would do just that.

The initiatives I've proposed so far today are designed to help students develop healthy minds and healthier bodies.

But we still have to address their spirit.

Schools do far more than just teach reading, writing, and arithmetic.

They can help parents as they teach their children values.

They can help children learn the value and responsibilities of being good citizens.

The more involved you are with your community, the better a citizen you become.

That's why I'm proposing legislation that would require all high school students in Illinois to perform forty hours of community service in order to graduate.

The Chicago Public Schools already require forty hours of community service in order to graduate.

We should too.

Since every community and every district is different, I m not going to stand here and mandate exactly how or when or where the service must be performed.

We ll leave that to the local schools.

What we will do is provide funding so that schools can develop and implement the community service requirements, and demonstrate the progress they re making.

At the same time that we re requiring students to perform service in order to graduate from high school, we also have to do more to help those students who are leaving school well before graduation.

In Illinois, one out of every seven students is a high school dropout.

The dropout rate is particularly high among African American and Latino students.

One out of every three Latino students, and one out of every five African American students, drops out of high school.

The 2000 U.S. Census showed that over 200,000 people in Illinois aged 16 to 24 had dropped out of high school.

In today s high-tech, fast paced economy, it is very difficult to get a good job without a college education.

So just imagine your odds of getting a good job without a high school diploma.

That s why we re creating a new program called GRADS.

GRADS will take the resources of over a dozen different state programs and focus each of them towards helping students especially Latino and African American students stay in school.

We re going to focus the efforts of the Department of Human Services, the Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, the Department of Employment Security, the Department of Public Health, and the Department of Children and Family Services all toward reducing the number of drop outs here in Illinois.

We ve created this program with the help of the Black and Latino Caucuses, and I d like to thank each of them for their leadership on this issue.

Not every child is suited for college.

Some children just aren t interested.

But that doesn t mean they re incapable of pursuing good careers.

For those students who want to pursue other vocations, they should be able to get the instruction they need.

That s why we should expand the Illinois Tech Prep program, and other programs like it.

This program is all about helping students who have the aptitude for vocational training.

We have to help them make the transition from high school to a program in a technical field.

Those are the fundamentals of our plan.

Helping kids learn how to read at an early age.

Helping parents identify services that can help their children.

Helping teachers access the training and tools they need to stay up to date.

Helping bring new types of teachers into the classroom.

Making sure that kids are healthy, that they can concentrate, that they eat right, and get enough exercise.

Making sure that we teach children their responsibility as citizens, teach them the value of service, and do everything we can to help them stay in school.

Those are the fundamentals that will help our schools improve.

They will help our students learn, from the day they are born, all the way through college, and prepare them for the rest of their lives.

But to succeed, we need to do more.

If we can't administer these programs properly if we can't implement them without taking 54 cents on the dollar away from the classroom if we can't find ways to help schools alleviate the crushing burden of process and paperwork and bureaucracy, we're just throwing good money after bad, into a system that sells our children short.

If we do not get our school system under control if we do not finally make the body that oversees our schools accountable, efficient, and cost-effective, if we don't set higher standards for ourselves and for our students, and do everything it takes to achieve them, we will never make real, fundamental progress when it comes to education here in Illinois.

If you care about education if you care about giving our children a chance at a better life, reforming the State Board of Education is the first, and single most important step we can take.

This has to happen.

If we fail to make real changes at the top, no matter how much money we spend, we will be unable to make any real improvement anywhere at all.

We cannot continue to make the mistakes of the past.

We cannot continue to allow the bureaucracy to stand in the way of educating our children.

At this time, at this moment, we share a unique opportunity.

An opportunity to change things, to challenge the status quo, to move forward, an opportunity to make things better.

Will it come with some struggle?

Meaningful change always does.

But for as long as we allow the State Board of Education to exist in its current form, accountable to no one, out there, beyond the reach of parents, beyond the reach of children, beyond the reach of teachers, in short, beyond the reach of everyone actually affected by the quality of education in this state, our schools will never truly improve.

If we care about the people we serve, it is our duty as elected officials, our responsibility as public servants, and our obligation as citizens, to take this step.

I m asking you to join with me in this fight.

I cannot promise it will be easy.

No fight ever is.

The State Board of Education will fight to preserve their perks their high salaries their bureaucracy with everything they ve got.

They ve had it good for a long time, and they re not going to want to see it end.

They ll throw every roadblock they can muster in the way of reform.

They ll say that they re the only ones who really understand education, and that we should just give them more money, and that will solve the problem.

They ll try to dispute the facts and figures, but that only confirms the underlying point: the current system is failing our children.

The choice here is very simple.

If you re satisfied with the state of education in Illinois, then leave the system the way it is.

But if you think as I do we can do better, then join us and make this change.

If you re sick and tired of hearing, year after year, that kids in Illinois are falling behind, failing tests, dropping out of school, if you re sick and tired of not being able to get your arms around the problem, because there s this big, unwieldy, unaccountable monolith out there that keeps standing in the way, I know how you feel.

Every member in this General Assembly wants to see the schools in his or her district do well.

In fact, I think it s fair to say that every member of the General Assembly wants to see every school in Illinois do well.

And I think it s equally fair to say that virtually every member has come here and tried to make a difference to improve our schools, and I bet every member here has at one time or another run into the same roadblocks, the same obstacles, the same problems, experienced the same frustrations, and has felt the same discouragement at being unable to do anything about it.

It doesn t have to be that way.

We can do something about it.

We have the power to make real change, and real reforms.

And if we do, we can finally have an education system in Illinois that s accountable, that can answer for results, that can respond to change, and most importantly of all, that can do better for the children of this state.

Now is the time. This is our chance.

The hour is here. Let us seize the moment.

Thank you.